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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AFRICAN SWINE FEVER OUTBREAK IN ARMENIA
(09/05/07)

REF: YEREVAN 1059 AND PREVIOUS

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

1. (SBU) As of September 4, the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) has confirmed ASF's existence in Armenia, and has announced the situation in Armenia on its website. (NOTE: In the past this has meant that, in order to contain the African Swine Fever (ASF) outbreak, OIE will probably recommend that the country's entire pig population (estimated at 300,000) will need to be slaughtered, and pens and other facilities burned down in order to eradicate fully the virus. This recommendation has not yet been made. END NOTE.)

-- As reported previously, the African Swine Fever (ASF) epidemic was reported in the two northeastern regions of Lori and Tavush, along the main traffic corridor from Georgia. Unconfirmed yet very reliable reports have also placed the virus in Kotayk, Yerevan and Gegharkunik districts.

-- The GOAM independently reported the outbreak, based on the Russian confirmation of ASF, to the OIE on August 30. According to USDA/APHIS office Vienna and specialists familiar with OIE procedures, the Russian confirmation is sufficient for official notification of ASF in Armenia. The GOAM continues to be unable to send tissue samples to the Pirbright lab in London, but this is no longer a priority.

-- UN/FAO is gathering a team of specialists to arrive in Armenia o/a September 9. One team member is from USDA/APHIS, but details of the other team members are unknown at this time. USDA Armenia and UNFAO will collaborate on the team's work schedule and keep U.S. Mission informed of the findings.

-- The GOAM reports that over 1,000 pigs have been culled in the north since the outbreak began three weeks ago, though experts attached to USAID implementer DAI believes the actual number is larger.

-- GOAM public statements have been terse, and the press appears at best confused and at worst to have been muzzled with regard to the crisis. Last Friday, State-run Armenian press reported that 300 pigs in the Tavush region had died from anthrax. (NOTE: It is not clear whether they were confusing anthrax with ASF, as the symptoms are similar, or this was intentional misinformation to assuage the public. END NOTE.)

-- In an effort to quell rumors and panic concerning ASF's threat to humans, the Minister of Agriculture stated today that his office will issue an ASF fact sheet for the Armenian public on September 7. The Ministry of Health has not issued any statement.

-- GOAM's containment and response to the outbreak continues to be

ad hoc, though it has begun to utilize the team of agricultural engineers we suggested in our letter to the Ag Min on August 24, and has brought in a World Bank funded Canadian specialist with experience on the ASF crisis in Georgia.

--Post convened a Donor Coordination Group meeting with EU, World Bank, UN/FAO and other international donors to assess the situation and what has been learned so far. The EU has not been approached by GOAM; UN/FAO has been assisting with getting the test samples to London (now a less urgent matter); and the World Bank has been doling out credit to the GOAM to pay for petty expenses like fuel and disinfectants.

-- Russia has banned Armenian imports of milk, cheese and other milk products, as well as meat and meat projects. Georgia is expected to do the same.

SAMPLE SAGA

12. For a variety of reasons, the GOAM has not been able to surmount the obstacles that have prevented it from sending host samples to London for the past week. GOAM customs regulations, the airport's lapsed bio-matter handling certification, and GOAM's reluctance to declare a national emergency have combined with international constraints based on ASF's harmlessness to humans to make getting confirmation from an OIE-approved laboratory nigh impossible. The current thinking is that if the GOAM were to declare an emergency, it would allow OIE to send experts to package the samples and transport them themselves to London. As of Monday, September 3, this is no longer an issue and will not be considered.

YEREVAN 00001107 002 OF 002

WORLD BANK RESPONSE

13. (SBU) The World Bank has arranged for international ASF expert Daniel Hurnik to be hired by GOAM for an on-site investigation into the efforts to contain and eradicate the ASF virus in Armenia. Hurnik arrived in country around September 2 from Georgia, where he had been assisting authorities there with their months-long outbreak. It is expected that he will meet with international donors near the end of his visit later this week.

UN/FAO RESPONSE

14. (SBU) For its part, FAO is thinking long-term. It plans to have an assessment and evaluation team on the ground in Armenia by early next week. The goal of the team's mission will be to assess those areas in which the GOAM did well and those which need to be improved in preparation for the next outbreak.

COMPENSATING LOSSES

15. (SBU) We are not aware of any GOAM plans to compensate largely poor pig owners for the financial losses resulting from a complete culling of the swine population and destruction of pens and other facilities. Because owners generally underreport the number of livestock they own in order to evade taxes, the implementation of a compensation plan would be tricky and could be subject to fraud.

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